

## Leadership in a Global Society:

Habits of Mind, of Heart, and of Action

**Elizabeth C. Reilly**  
*Pepperdine University*

*Abstract: If the world is flat, what, then, are the implications for and obligations of educational leaders? Leaders in Bangalore, India offer habits of mind, of heart, and of action that can serve as the bases for a model of educational leadership for the twenty-first century.*

### A New Alexandrian Meets the Flat World

*The best and noblest gifts of humanity cannot be the monopoly of a particular race or country.*

—Rabindranath Tagore

*Ideagoras, The New Alexandrians, Prosumers, Peer Networks, Weapons for Mass Collaboration, Mash-ups* (Tapscott & Williams, 2006). If these terms seem to be little more than Greek, then consider these questions: What must I know and be able to do to lead in a global society? What must those whose scholarship and learning I guide know and be able to do? How do I, as a leader, prepare a generation of children for a world that I will not see? Clearly, no multiple guess answers to these questions

exist. While on its face there may seem to be little relationship between *ideagoras* and the questions of leadership in a global society, I submit that they are inextricably linked. The clarity of their convergence, however, will require some background context.

Less than two years ago as I began preparing to teach a doctoral course for educational leaders on transforming organizations in a global society, a triptych of themes emerged. First, implicit in the notion of transforming organizations was the idea of leadership—the habits of mind, of heart, and of action that a global leader would embrace. Second, there was the organization itself—the attributes of one that embodied global perspectives. Finally, there was the matter of a global society—its meaning and its implications for leadership and for organizations. I examined any research that seemed to address these questions. I sought the counsel of leaders of global organizations and began to consider the work that these individuals did, seeking possible analogues to serve the educational community. President and Chief Executive Officer Samuel R. Starr of Sterling Commerce, Inc. suggested I read Tom Friedman's, *The world is flat* (2005).

Friedman (2005) posited that in only the past several years, ten forces have served to flatten the world and, "It is this triple convergence—of new players, on a new playing field, developing new processes and habits for horizontal development—that...is the most important force shaping global economics and politics in the early twenty-first century" (pp. 181-182). As I began poring through Friedman's book and considering his thesis, a model for leadership emerged that spoke to the needs of educational leaders of the twenty-first century. The questions that resulted were:

1. If we embrace the assumption that the world is flat, then what are these new rules, new roles, and new relationships of which we must be aware to be successful?
  - a. What must young people know and be able to do?
  - b. What must educational leaders know and be able to do?
2. What are the implications of these new rules, new roles, and new relationships for the nations of the world?
  - a. How should this knowledge serve to inform educational policy in our nation?
  - b. How should this knowledge serve to inform the training of educational leaders in our nation?

In an effort to begin exploring these issues, I considered the role that

two emerging powerhouses—China and India—were playing on the global stage. I initially found India to be the more compelling of the two, for it was the world's largest democratic nation state. The third question that emerged then was, If we look at leaders in India, are there habits of mind, of heart, and of action that can help us understand these new rules, new roles, and new relationships? When Sam Starr (personal communication, January 10, 2006) declared, "If you would you like to meet the people in Friedman's (2005) book, I can make the introductions," the many questions about leadership in a global society moved beyond the library databases to the fragrant, jasmine-scented gardens of Southern India.

### Embracing the Flat World

*By definition, a truly global company has no physical or regional boundaries. It builds planetary ecosystems for designing, sourcing, assembling, and distributing products on a global basis.*

—Don Tapscott & Anthony D. Williams

What, then, are educational leaders to know and be able to do? Wheatley (1999) used quantum physics as a means to describe organizational theory and suggested that the complexities of chaos theory mirror the complexities of the human systems that we create. She asserted,

In organizations, we are very good at measuring activity. Fractals suggest the futility of searching for ever finer measures that concentrate on separate parts of the system. There is never a satisfying end to this reductionist search, never an end point where we finally know everything about even that one small part of the system. Scientists of chaos study shapes in motion. If we were to understand organizations in a similar way, what would constitute the shapes in motion of an organization?

Different answers to this question are emerging from studies of organizations as whole systems. Learning to look for wholeness is a new skill for us, and it has been difficult not to rely on old measures, even when we know they don't give us the information we need. But seeing patterns is not a foreign skill for us; we are, after all, a pattern-recognizing species...But after so many years of data analysis has left us drowning in increasing minutia, we need to help one another reconnect to this innate ability. (p. 125)

To enter Wheatley's (1999) world of "form and shape" (p. 126), I chose to examine the questions about leadership from a qualitative perspective, where detailed field notes and interviews would serve as the basis from which patterns could emerge. This approach would permit a more thoughtful and long-term examination of the three levels of the culture

of an organization and of the leaders who guided them—the artifacts, its espoused values and beliefs, and its basic underlying assumptions (Schein, 2004). Schein's work on organizational culture and leadership compliments Wheatley's, for he maintained that discerning anything beyond artifacts is a complex matter and that an attempt to discern underlying assumptions from artifacts alone can lead one down a delusional path of misinterpretation. He stated,

My argument is that unless one digs down to the level of the basic assumptions, one cannot really decipher the artifacts, values, and norms. On the other hand, if one finds some of those basic assumptions and explores their interrelationship, one is really getting at the essence of the culture and can then explain a great deal of what goes on. This essence can sometimes be analyzed as a paradigm in that some organizations function by virtue of an interlocking, coordinated set of assumptions. *Whereas each one alone might not make sense, the pattern explains the behavior and the success of the organization in overcoming its external and internal challenges* [italics added]. (p. 59)

Bangalore, India, serves as the equivalent of Silicon Valley in the United States. With its cows in the road as ubiquitous as the temples, mosques, and churches, this city of 5,545,000 is a study in contrasts. Governmental infrastructure is a huge problem, and garbage and potholes punctuate every moment of the drive to Electronic City, which houses many of the famous multinational corporations that serve as the backbone for India's lead role in the flat world. Infosys Technologies Limited, often described as Disneyworld's Epcot Center in real time, is a lush, verdant array of gardens, architecturally intriguing buildings, walking pathways, and food courts, and is but one example of the future of India.

While many of my interviews with executives and professors were organized in advance of my arrival in India, some conversations began in unlikely places: breakfast in the café, the hotel entrance while waiting for one's driver, or a conversation with the hotel concierge could result in meeting an executive and a subsequent interview. I met IBM Vice President Anthony Riggs on his first morning in Bangalore and when he learned that I was in India to research leadership, he knew we must talk. Often, conversations began with more global views of leadership. Riggs asserted,

I have a vision that we are not stuck in a place in time and that you and I... are changing the world. I will not accept what has been handed to me. I feel that I have the power to shape where we're going and I know you do too. I'm not going to play the cards that are dealt me and I'm going to look for a new hand....Forward thinkers....make the world a better place. (personal communication, April 21, 2006)

Changing the world is indeed a tall order, and while the lessons are tentative and the patterns not completely formed, themes from a land many time zones from the United States of America are emerging and recurring. I offer five considerations regarding habits of mind, of heart, and of action that can help us in formulating the new rules, new roles, and new relationships necessary to lead in a global society. They are: (a) Be a learner; (b) Spend time in the world; (c) Value innovation; (d) Maintain transparency; and (e) Seek the best. Following each consideration are questions to reflect upon for yourself and for those whom you serve as a leader.

### ***Global Leaders are Learners***

They listen. They question. They step lightly but immerse themselves deeply wherever their planes land. Most hold multiple degrees—the most popular in India being engineering as an undergraduate and MBA at the graduate level. Global leaders insist that everyone else in their midst also be learners. The Infosys Leadership Institute prepares far more leaders than its own ranks can absorb, but it sees this seeming creation of its own competition as raising the bar for all. Rajani Kanth Katragadda, Associate Vice President of the Infosys Leadership Institute, explained, “If all you have is one apple, then you have to decide how much to cut off and give to others, but if you have a bushel of apples or an entire tree, then you can share with the entire world” (personal communication, April 20, 2006). Operating from a perspective of abundance rather than one of limitation is what he cites as a lasting pillar of leadership success. Within two days of his arrival, Anthony Riggs had dispatched a team from IBM in the United States to go to Bangalore to learn more. “One of my people will spend a year here. I have instructed him to change nothing. Rather, he is to learn and to report back everything to us” (A. Riggs, personal communication, April 21, 2006).

*When was the last time you learned something new—something so new that you could feel the fog blow away? What did you do with that new knowledge? Do you read broadly and widely and see analogues from other fields emerge that can support our work in educational leadership? Were you curious enough about the terms, ideagora or mash-up that you sought their meaning before you reached this paragraph?*

### ***Global Leaders Spend Time in the World***

They read the white papers. They keep up with the world news. They research broadly topics such as economics, sociology, and history. Their top executives brief them. But they do not stop there. They, themselves, visit the countries. Every Indian executive with whom I have worked

has lived abroad for some period of time. Most had lived in the West and many had lived in other Asian countries, South America, or elsewhere. They possess a savvy that ranges from knowledge of music to languages, world history to art. They fight the necessity many times of the “fly by,” where they realistically can only spend a few days in a country, and seek over time to understand nations in which they are presently a part and nations that are for them, on the horizon—the emerging markets.

*Is your passport current? Do you use it? Does your knowledge of China, India, and other global players extend beyond what you learned in sixth grade world history? Do you get off the tour bus and immerse yourself in other cultures in ways that make you feel a bit awkward or do you merely transport your comfortable life into another time zone?*

### ***Global Leaders Value Innovation***

They value innovation, but not at the expense of the culture of another nation or of the organization. They recognize that to move fast, you sometimes have to move slowly, and they pay attention to the values of the culture in which they find themselves (Schein, 2004). On acquiring the Bangalore-based company, Yantra Solutions, Sam Starr worked with its executives to make a gradual transition to the “Sterling Way,” and sought to keep the best of the new company’s values and beliefs. While after one year’s time, Yantra became Sterling Commerce, Inc., the name, *Yantra*, which holds many meanings in Sanskrit, became the name of the company’s newly formed foundation. In the spirit of Abraham George’s (2005) establishment of Shanti Bhavan, a school for the poor, they committed the foundation’s resources to supporting the needs of local primary schools. Rather than impose the values of the parent company, global leaders seek to move beyond the multinational model, which inculcates the parent’s values to the children regardless of the implication, and seek to embrace a *transnational model*. Buck Devashish (personal communication, May 1, 2006), chief of India’s Sterling Commerce, recognizes this model is one in which the organization embraces the unique strengths of each culture.

*Do you embody the attributes of a “New Alexandrian” (Tapscott & Williams, 2006, pp. 156-157)? Is your research extending beyond the borders of your present efforts and seeking to collaborate with new people, in new ways, and in new places? Have you considered establishing an ideagora or creating a mash-up? Do only the science teachers talk about ecosystems? Do these new ideas make their way into your classrooms and leadership practices?*

### ***Global Leaders Are Transparent***

“Put *that* in your research, Elizabeth,” one Infosys executive (personal communication, May 6, 2007) said in reference to my digital recorder that was as welcome as I in the inner sanctum of a planning meeting. To a great degree, the paper shredder is becoming obsolete. These executives do not mind recordings of conversations and they do not call legal counsel. I do not sign non-disclosure forms in triplicate. Without question they openly share both successes and challenges that they face. They recognize the difficult and seemingly intractable problems, whether inequality, caste, corruption, or poverty. They seek cooperative relationships everywhere, and they aggressively work to involve those beyond their borders—the borders of their companies and of their nations. Wipro Vice President, Ranjan Acharya, meets regularly with government officials, querying, “What would be the worst thing that could happen if you tried this innovation” (personal communication, May 20, 2006)? While yet they blanch when he speaks, he is relentless in building the partnership. Restructuring the “democratic deficit” (Stiglitz, 2006, p. 281) is not only a concept whose time has come on a global scale, but must become embraced in authentic ways in our schools and universities.

*Are decisions made in back room cabals or with the authentic involvement of a broad spectrum of individuals within your organization? Do you seek to build the leadership capacity of all with whom you work or cling to traditional top-down leadership models and organizational paradigms (Lambert, 2005)?*

### ***Global Leaders Seek the Best***

Nationalism in the classic sense is a dying concept. If the best work is to be had in Bangalore, then leaders will go there. Riggs stated,

I deliver the work to the country where the best work is being done. I look around the world and say, “Who’s good at this?” If their business model does not work and they become complacent, if they have no interest in innovation, if they are satisfied with the status quo, and if they are not in growth mode, then I challenge them. If they are not willing to engage in the challenge, then I look around the world and say, “Who will take it up?” (T. Riggs, personal communication, April 21, 2006)

Clearly, this has huge implications for the United States and its children’s future, however, the cow, in the case of India, is not out of the barn; it was never in the barn. In its recent report, the National Center on Education and the Economy (2007) whose New Commission calls for sweeping changes in American education and training, unequivocally echoes the IBM executive when it asserts,

The best employers the world over will be looking for the most competent, most creative, and most innovative people on the face of the earth and will be willing to pay them top dollar for their services. This will not be true not just for the top professionals and managers, but up and down the length and breadth of the workforce. (p. xix)

Because loyalty has a new face irrespective of geographical boundaries—loyalty to values of learning, innovation, vision, collaboration and change—we must do more than pay close attention: we must take immediate action.

*Do you surround yourself with people of many perspectives, including those that may not wholly agree with yours? Do you seek top quality individuals who embody these five principles to fill roles in your organizations? Do you pay lip service to diversity or actively seek those who represent many cultures, races, and religions? Do you understand the implications for education in the West because of the unrelenting surge of a well-prepared workforce emerging from around the globe?*

### Unimagined Bridges

*[What is needed is] a globalization of democracies, multilateralism, science and technology, and a global economic system designed to meet human needs. We could call this an Enlightened Globalization.*

—Jeffrey D. Sachs

The authors' messages in this year's journal impel us to move beyond the comfort of our safety nets to consider a world beyond that which we presently imagine. The authors' research, their analyses and syntheses, and their challenges to action reflect three principal themes: the globalization of vision, of innovation, and of collaboration. First, the authors ask us to be aware of the ineluctable challenge we have to hold a broad vision of the work that we do—a vision that fearlessly explores the world in search of solutions to vexing conundrums. Second, they suggest new ways to approach leading, teaching, and learning and the moral imperative to level the global playing field so that all may partake. Finally, they offer by example, models of collaboration on an international scale. If we have presented a compelling story in this year's journal, then the words on these pages will become the conversations in your schools and universities, and will serve as new habits of mind, of heart, and of action.

Being an American guarantees us little any longer, but "in the deepest recesses of our beings lies the inner voice that tells us what is true and helps us to connect our heads with our hearts and our spirits with our work" (Reilly, 2006, p. 164). We can delude ourselves into believing that our "circle the wagons" mentality and our military might will protect us



or we can recognize that the greatest protection is to humbly join the world community as learners, innovators, visionaries, collaborators, and change agents. As educational leaders, we have the unique opportunity to influence countless numbers of individuals, for we touch those who touch the children who shall live in that world we shall never see. The future, regardless of the language of one's birth, belongs to those who embrace values that know no geopolitical borders.

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